PushBack: Engaging in Online Activism

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

This lesson explores how young people can use online media for activism on issues that matter to them. Through the discussion and scenarios that are presented, students will develop their knowledge and ability to respond or "push back" against issues they feel passionate about, such as racism, discrimination, sexism – and make a difference. At the end of the lesson students will use The eQuality Project *PushBack Timeline* to research examples of online youth activism on topics that appeal to them. The end goal of this lesson is to create an understanding of youth activism that can transition into the lives of students outside of the classroom.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Develop a new understanding of how youth can advocate for social change
- Gain the ability to apply their understanding outside of a classroom setting
- Identify the characteristics and contexts of online activism
- Research an online activist campaign

Preparation and Materials

- Prepare to project the *PushBack* slideshow and have chart paper ready for the students.
- Prepare to show the Digital Literacy 101 video *Interactions Through Digital Media Can Have a Real Impact.* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2mrvhMY4QA)
- Photocopy the *PushBack Scenario* handouts.
- Photocopy the *PushBack Research Project* assignment sheet.
- Ensure that students have access to the Internet and that they can access The eQuality Project *PushBack Timeline.* (http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/).

Optional: Prepare to show the video *Julia Bluhm and Izzy Labbe at TEDxWomen 2012* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOdyhEeYnJI#t=3m29s).

Procedure

PushBack Slideshow, Part 1

Begin by projecting slides one to four of the *PushBack* slideshow. As you review these slides, ask students the questions below, but don't feel a need to reach consensus on any of these questions – just get students' opinions and move on.

Slide 2:

- Have you ever come across something that bothered you because it was unfair or unjust? (Examples could be specific rules such as a dress code, stereotypes, gendered toys, sexism in rap songs, racist statements by celebrities, etc.)
- When something bothers you, what do you do about it?
- Is it okay to push back if there is something you think is unfair or unjust?

Slide 3:

- Can you think of examples of things where you would not push back?
- Imagine a situation where something bothered you, but you did nothing about it. What are some reasons why you might choose not to do anything?

Slide 4: *Show the embedded video.*

- What does it mean to be a full citizen online?
- Based on what you've seen in the video, what might be some things you should be careful to avoid when getting involved online? (Examples might be hurting people's feelings without meaning to, assuming that everyone believes the same things as the noisiest people, etc.)

Slide 5:

- What are some examples of things that you, as a student, could do to change things? (Examples might include organizing a protest, writing letters, starting a twitter hashtag, contacting people in power, etc.)

Slide 6: Who? / When?

- Thinking generally, what kinds of people do you think engage in activism? (You might want to designate a student to create a mind map on the board of the characteristics that activists may share.)
- How do you think activism online is similar to or different from activism offline?
- Are there some people or groups of people who would be more likely to use the Internet for activism than others? What might be some reasons for this? (Examples may include groups or individuals who are marginalized and/or vulnerable.)
- Do you think that age matters when it comes to online activism? Do you need to wait until you reach a certain age?

- How many young people do you think engage in online activism? (A third of Canadian students have done something to support an activist group online.)

Slide 7: Examples

A third of students in Canada have supported activist groups, but other students have also started effective campaigns themselves. Let's look at some examples of issues that have driven young people towards activism.

- What might you want to change about happy meals and teen magazines? Everything, nothing or some things?
- If you were to try and change these how would you do it?
- Do you believe you would be successful?

Slide 8: Antonia Ayres-Brown

- Antonia Ayres-Brown is an example of a young person who made a difference when she changed the practice of handing out gender stereotype toys with Happy Meals when she was 11-years-old. She wrote letters, did research and filed complaints until McDonald's agreed to offer children any toy they wanted.

Her story can be found here: http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/04/21/mcdonald_s_and_me_my_fight_to_end_gendered_happy_meal_toys.html.

Slide 9: Julia Bluhm & Izzy Labbe

- 14-year-olds Julia Bluhm and Izzy Labbe changed the photoshopping practices of *Seventeen* magazine by starting a petition that got over 84,000 signatures.

Their story can be found here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chrysula-winegar/julia-bluhm-izzy-labbe_b_2904622.html. Or, if time permits, you may choose to show his video, which elaborates on their push back effort: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOdyhEeYnJI#t=3m29s.

Slide 10: Emma González

- Emma González was one of the survivors of the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, who became determined to prevent future tragedies by advocating for gun control. They made use of digital platforms from Twitter to YouTube to get their message out and organize other people across their country.

Their story can be found here: https://www.politico.com/interactives/2018/politico50/the-parkland-teens/.

PushBack Timeline

After reviewing these two examples of activism, divide students into small groups and ask them to explore the *PushBack Timeline* (http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/) and to identify examples of activism that they find interesting and/or speak to them. After they select examples, ask them:

- Why did you choose these specific examples?

- What about them speaks to you?

- Do they address issues that are important to you such as sexism, racism, or body image issues in the media?

PushBack Slideshow, Part 2

Slide 11: Quick Review

- Based on what we've talked about, and the stories we've just seen, what does it mean to "push back" against injustice? What is online activism? Think about your answers and then share them with your neighbours. (Give students a chance to discuss and then see if there is consensus.)

- Who can get involved in pushing back or activism online?

Slide 12: Discussion

- Distribute the *PushBack Scenario* handouts and assign one of the scenarios to each student.

- Group students so that they are together with the other students who were assigned the same scenario.

- Have groups review their scenario and answer the attached questions. Once this is done, have each group summarize the scenario for the rest of the class and share their answers to the questions.

- Lead a brief whole-class discussion after each scenario to see if any students disagree with the group's response.

Once all of the scenarios have been discussed, use them to lead a whole-class discussion on the characteristics of activism. The class should be able to come up with a definition that includes the following points:

- Activism brings about a positive change, it is not bullying

- Movements seek to create real change that continues

- Anyone can be an activist

- Activism does not always have to be big

- Activism requires being well-informed about an issue

As a closing exercise, continue the whole-class discussion concerning specific issues that they have encountered, and whether they think that these issues could be addressed via an online campaign. Encourage the class to address the following questions:

- Is it appropriate to use social media to address this issue?

- Is there a specific platform that would be more effective? Why? (Encourage them to think about the different audiences that use different platforms and how people use them.)

Assessment/Evaluation Task: Research Project

Project Slide 13 of the *PushBack* slideshow.

Distribute the *PushBack Research Project* assignment sheet. Have students use the eQuality *PushBack Timeline* (http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/) to find an example of online activism that was led by or involved youth and then research it using other online sources. Their report should include the following information:

- Where and when did the movement start?
- Who started the movement?
- What inspired the movement to start?
- What was the impact of the movement?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the movement?
- Why did the movement succeed or fail?
- Why is their movement a form of activism?

PushBack Scenarios

Scenario 1: Adeel

Adeel just got his first job at a fast food place. He notices that his fellow workers are very rude to customers and don't take time to make the food properly, but he is too shy to say anything to them. Instead he posts his complaints on social media and makes fun of his job, the food, and his co-workers. Adeel's posts start off as light humour, but he slowly gets angrier about the workers and the food and his comments become cruel. Eventually his boss sees his posts and fires Adeel.

Was there something wrong with Adeel's actions? Is it reasonable to say that his posts would lead to something bad? Can this be considered activism? Why or why not?

Scenario 2: Ruby

Ruby recently discovered that her favourite shoe store uses child labour to create their products. She tells her friends and fellow classmates. Everyone is very upset and vows not to buy anything from that store. A few weeks later, everyone has forgotten and continues to purchase items from that store, including Ruby.

Ruby had good intentions, but then what happened? Can this really be considered activism? Why or why not?

Scenario 3: Eleanor and Jasper

An owner of a popular clothing store makes derogatory comments about women. Groups of people decide to organize silent protests outside the store to encourage shoppers to take their business to another establishment. Eleanor's older brother Jasper is helping organize the protest online and to make posters. Eleanor helps him, but she thinks she is too young to attend the protest.

Is there anything wrong with the protest plans? Is this considered activism? Why or why not? Is Eleanor (13 years old) right to think she is too young to make a difference?

Scenario 4: Lucas, Ava and Mei

Lucas and Ava are angry at the homophobic remarks and stereotypes that are presented in an ad in a local store. They create a petition asking the owner to remove or change the ad to something more inclusive. After the majority of the town signs the petition, the owner agrees to stop using the ad. Lucas and Ava feel very accomplished until a classmate named Mei said they really hadn't done much because it was only a local store.

Is Mei right? Or can Lucas and Ava's actions be considered activism? Why or why not?

Scenario 5: Javier and Taylor

A new ad comes out for Javier's and Taylor's favourite candy. They are furious when they see it because the ad makes it appear that only girls can enjoy that candy. With support from other boys in their class they write a letter to the company telling them that the ad they created was wrong. The company replies and explains that the ad was already removed and was not approved by them at all. Another company had created the ad to ruin their candy sales.

Do you think Javier and Taylor did some research before they sent their letter? Should they have done this? Is this truly a form of activism? Why or why not?

PushBack Research Assignment

For this assignment you will be using the eQuality *PushBack Timeline.* (http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/) to pick an example of push back that was led by or involved youth, which you will then research using other online sources.

Your final report should include:

- Where and when did the movement start?
- Who started the movement?
- What inspired the movement to start?
- What was the impact of the movement?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the movement?
- Why did the movement succeed or fail?
- Why is their movement a form of activism?

Task Assessment Rubric: PushBack Research Assignment

	Learning Expectations	*Achievement*
Use Skills and competencies that fall under "use" range from basic technical know-how to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.	*Community Engagement:* use social media and participative technology use digital media to be part of a community exhibit leadership as a digital citizen *Finding and Verifying:* apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)
Understand Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us. Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.	*Community Engagement:* examine technological literacy and capability in modern society and their effects on citizenship and education understands the wider context of digital tools in a 'digital age' characterised by globalisation and networks *Finding and Verifying:* compare, contrast, and synthesize information from diverse sources (triangulate information) before it is used in a knowledge-making process	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)
Create Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo-sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.	*Community Engagement:* participate in society through online engagement in democratic actions (eg lobbying, petitions, parliament) make valuable contributions to the public knowledge domain (e.g. wikis, public forums, reviews) *Finding and Verifying:* create new critical or analytical works	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)
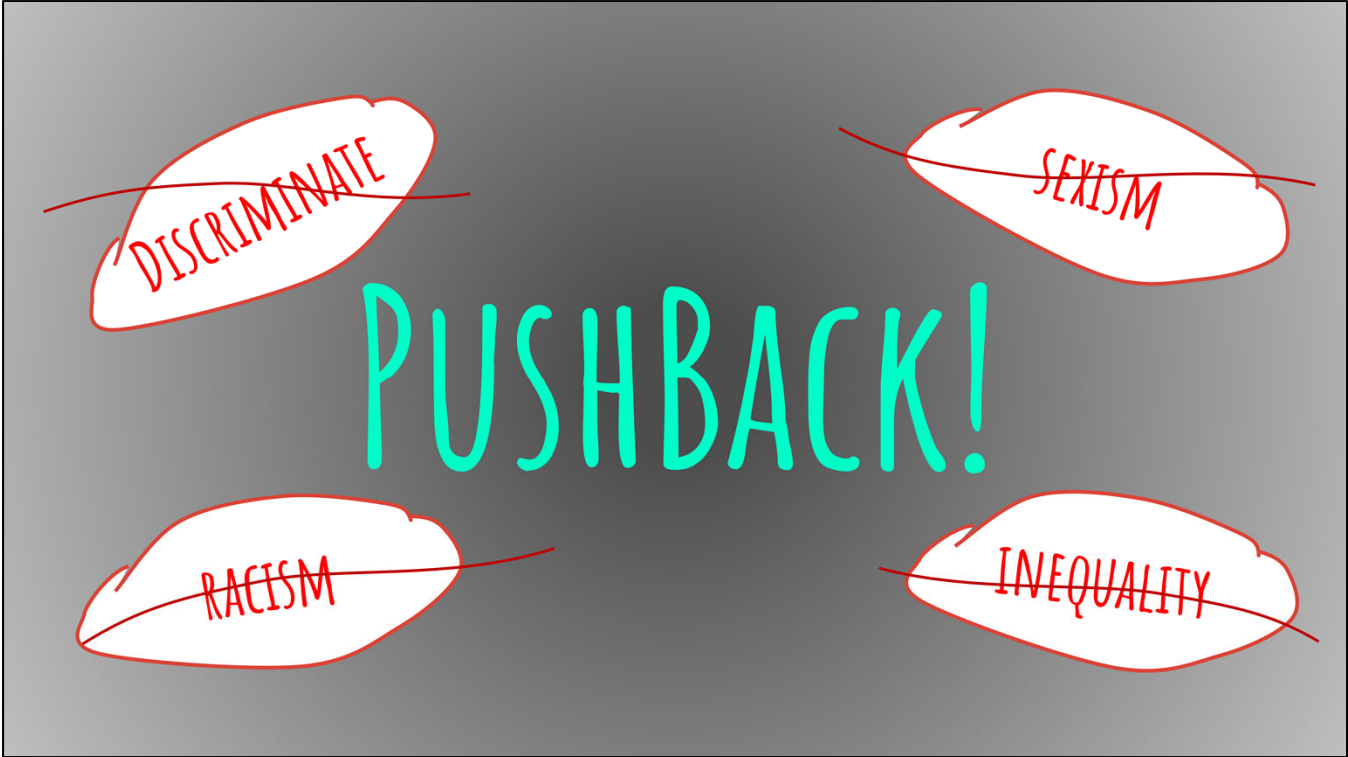
Something's Wrong!

What can I do about it?

Is there something that bothers you because it's unfair or unjust? (Examples could be specific rules such as a dress code, stereotypes, gendered toys, sexism in rap songs, racist statements by celebrities, etc.)

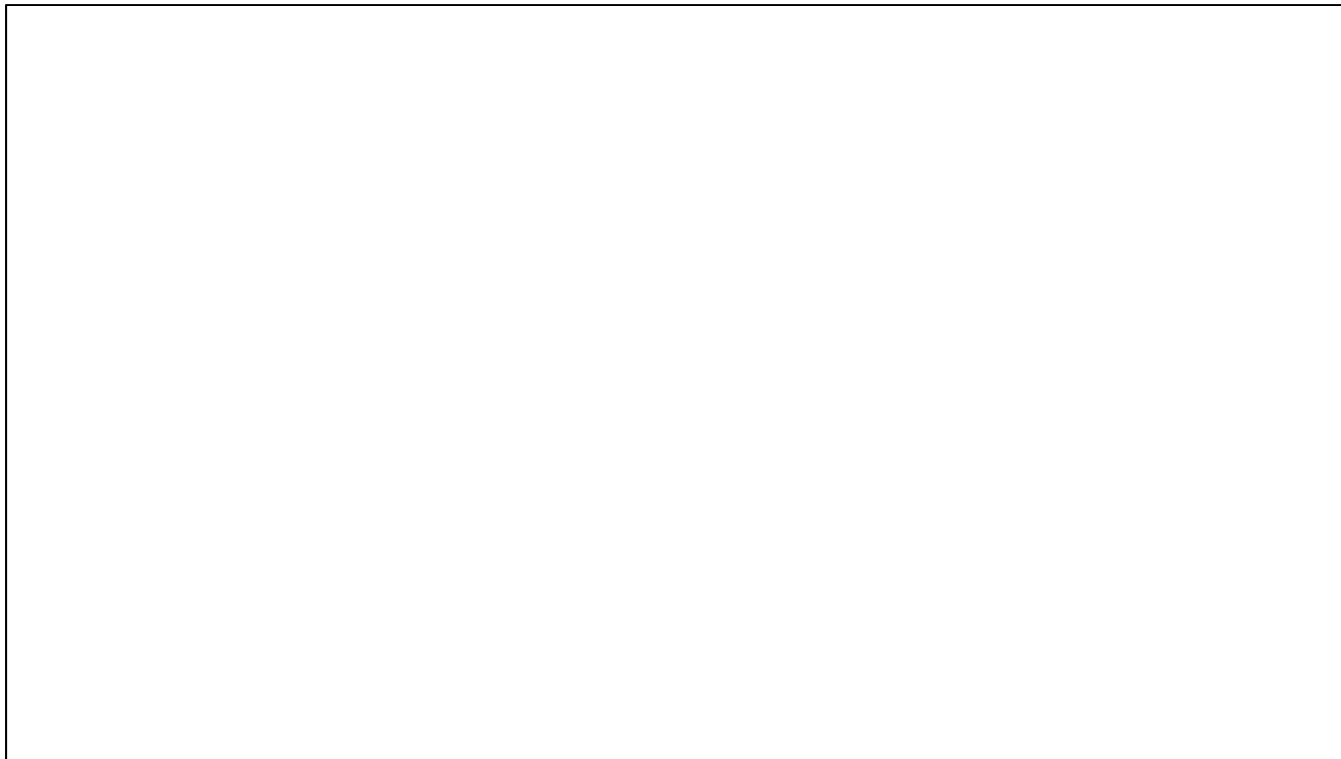When something bothers you, what do you do about it?

Is it okay to push back if there is something you think is unfair or unjust?

Can you think of examples of things where you would not push back?

Imagine a situation where something bothered you, but you did nothing about it. What are some reasons why you might choose not to do anything?

Show the embedded video.

Based on what you've seen in the video, what might be some things you should be careful to avoid when getting involved online? (Examples might be hurting people's feelings without meaning to, assuming that everyone believes the same things as the noisiest people, etc.)

What could you do to change things?

What are some examples of things that you, as a student, could do to change things? (Examples might include organizing a protest, writing letters, starting a twitter hashtag, contacting people in power, etc.)

WHO?
Who is engaging in online activism? What kind of people are they?

WHEN?
When do people start engaging in online activism?

- Thinking generally, what kinds of people do you think engage in activism?

- How do you think activism online is similar to or different from activism offline?

- Are there some people or groups of people who would be more likely to use the Internet for activism than others? What might be some reasons for this? (Examples may include groups or individuals who are marginalized and/or vulnerable.)

- Do you think that age matters when it comes to online activism? Do you need to wait until you reach a certain age?

- How many young people do you think engage in online activism? (A third of Canadian students have done something to support an activist group online.)

Examples

Figure 1. Happy Meal. From McDonald's Indonesia, 2017. http://www.mcdonalds.co.id/menu/menu-favorit/happy-meal

Figure 2. Seventeen Magazine. From Richard Johnson UK Blog, 2012. http://richardjohnson99.blogspot.ca/2012/04/

Happy Meals and Teen Magazines

A third of students in Canada have supported activist groups, but other students have also started effective campaigns themselves. Let's look at some examples of issues that have driven young people towards activism.

What might you want to change about happy meals and teen magazines? Everything, nothing or some things?

If you were to try and change these how would you do it?

Do you believe you would be successful?

Figure 3. Antonia Ayres-Brown.. From The Guardian, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/08/feminist-battle-women-activists-campaigns

Antonia Ayres-Brown

Antonia Ayres-Brown is an example of a young person who made a difference when she changed the practice of handing out gender stereotype toys with Happy Meals when she was aged 11-years-old. She wrote letters, did research and filed complaints until McDonald's agreed to offer children any toy they wanted.

(Her story can be found here: http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/04/21/mcdonald_s_and_me_my_fight_to_end_gendered_happy_meal_toys.html.)

Figure 4. Julia Bluhm and Izzy Labbe. From Huffington Post, 2013.

14-year-olds Julia Bluhm and Izzy Labbe changed the photoshopping practices of *Seventeen* magazine by starting a petition that got over 84,000 signatures.

(Their story can be found here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chrysula-winegar/julia-bluhm-izzy-labbe_b_2904622.html. Or, if time permits, you may choose to show his video, which elaborates on their pushback effort: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOdyhEeYnJI#t=3m29s)

Emma Gonzalez. From The Teen Vogue, March 23 2018. https://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-gonzalez-parkland-gun-control-cover

Emma González was one of the survivors of the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, who became determined to prevent future tragedies by advocating for gun control. They made use of digital platforms from Twitter to YouTube to get their message out and organize other people across their country.

(Their story can be found here: https://www.politico.com/interactives/2018/politico50/the-parkland-teens/.)

Quick Review

| What does pushback mean? | What is activism? | Who can do it? |

Based on what we've talked about, and the stories we've just seen, what does it mean to "push back" against injustice? What is online activism? Think about your answers and then share them with your neighbours. *(Give students a chance to discuss and then see if there is consensus.)*

Who can get involved in pushing back or activism online?

Distribute the PushBack Scenario handouts and assign one of the scenarios to each student.

Group students so that they are together with the other students who were assigned the same scenario.

Have groups review their scenario and answer the attached questions. Once this is done, each group will summarize the scenario for the rest of the class and share their answers to the questions.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion after each scenario to see if any students disagree with the group's response.

Research Assignment

PushBack Project

1. Pick a topic that interests you using The eQuality PushBack Timeline

   http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/

2. Try to focus on push back created by youth

3. Research the movement in depth

4. Write about your findings

Include:

- Who started the movement?

- Where and when did it take place?

- What caused it to start and what was the impact?

- What were its strengths and weaknesses?

- Why did it succeed?

- Why is this a form of activism?

Something's Wrong!

What can I do about it?

What could you do to change things?

WHO?

Who is engaging in online activism? What kind of people are they?

WHEN?

When do people start engaging in online activism?

Examples

Figure 1. Happy Meal. From McDonald's Indonesia, 2017. http://www.mcdonalds.co.id/menu/menu-favorit/happy-meal

Figure 2. Seventeen Magazine. From Richard Johnson UK Blog, 2012. http://richardjohnson99.blogspot.ca/2012/04/

Happy Meals and Teen Magazines

Figure 3. Antonia Ayres-Brown.. From The
Guardian, 2017.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2
017/mar/08/feminist-battle-women-activists-
campaigns

Antonia Ayres-Brown

Julia Bluhm
&
Izzy labbe

Figure 4. Julia Bluhm and Izzy Labbe. From Huffington Post, 2013.

Emma Gonzàlez

Emma Gonzalez. From The Teen Vogue, March 23 2018. https://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-gonzalez-parkland-gun-control-cover

Quick Review

What does pushback mean? → What is activism? → Who can do it?

Discussion

Research Assignment

PushBack Project

1. Pick a topic that interests you using The eQuality PushBack Timeline

   http://www.equalityproject.ca/get-involved/pushback/

2. Try to focus on push back created by youth

3. Research the movement in depth

4. Write about your findings

Include:

- Who started the movement?

- Where and when did it take place?

- What caused it to start and what was the impact?

- What were its strengths and weaknesses?

- Why did it succeed?

- Why is this a form of activism?